

Dawlish Local History Group

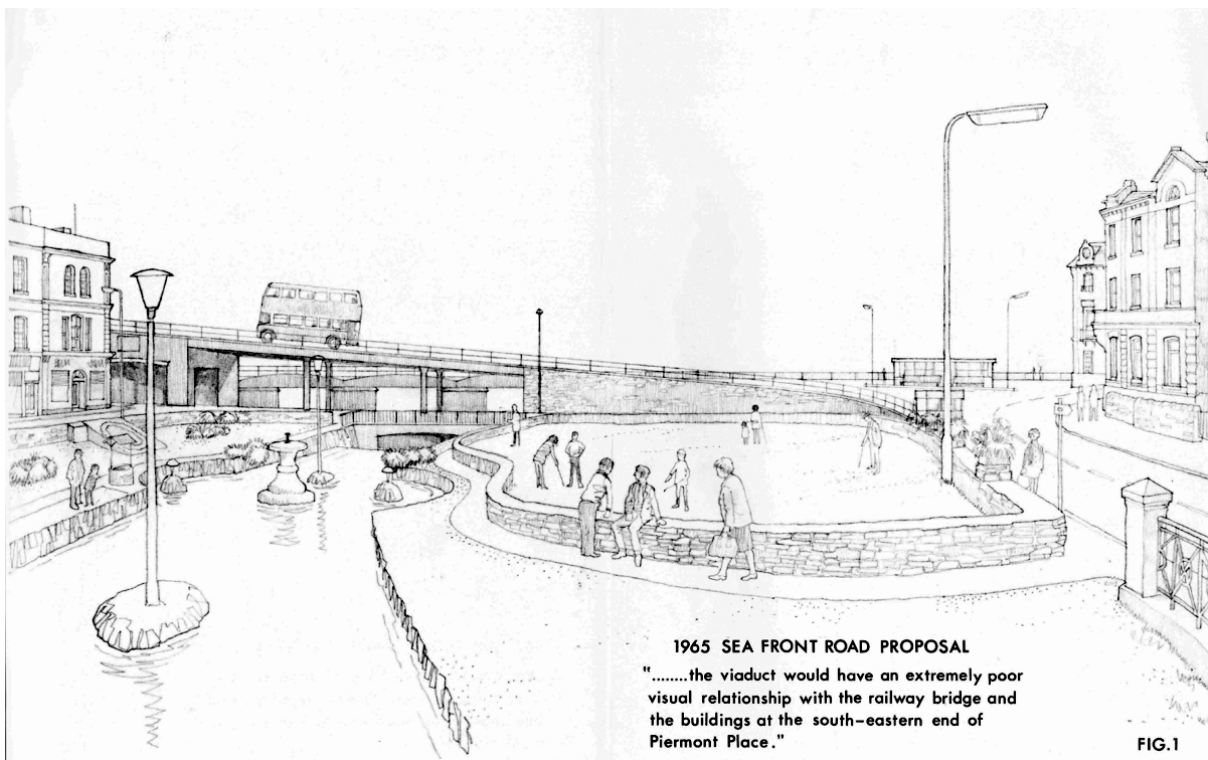
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What might have been!

By David Allanach



Would you have liked to see the main road re-routed to run parallel with the railway past Tucks Plot linking Exeter Road and Teignmouth Hill and thus avoiding the sharp corners in town? It was a long-held dream of planners apparently going back to the 1930s. Actually, part of the idea is much older as before the railway the turnpike road, constructed in 1831, was routed from a junction just before Elm Grove Road down the cliff near the coastguard

houses and ran past what became the station but then turned to link with the predecessor of the Jubilee Bridge and thus join up with Teignmouth Hill. It must have made life a lot easier for the stage coaches and others who would previously have had a standing start up the steep lower section of Strand Hill and then, hoping that nothing was coming from the High Street or Exeter Road directions, turned sharp right. Alas, Brunel's plans meant that the turnpike had to go.

By the 1960s the railways were in seemingly terminal decline and the motor car use was rising inexorably. This was putting great pressure on our towns and cities. In 1963 Colin Buchanan produced his influential report *Traffic in Towns* which proposed how British towns could be redesigned to accommodate growing car use. Although it pre-dates the Buchanan report by a year the Devon County Council Dawlish Town Plan incorporates the mood music of the time.

Initially three schemes had been looked at: a bypass which was regarded as very expensive and having a negative effect on the countryside but was really vetoed because it was said that only 20% of car users would use it. Another option was an inner relief road. The route would be High Street, Alexandra Road, Barton Hill and Westcliff Road but it was rejected as it would also be relatively expensive and circuituous and importantly would involve demolishing about 55 dwellings, 12 shops, 2 garages and the White Hart pub.

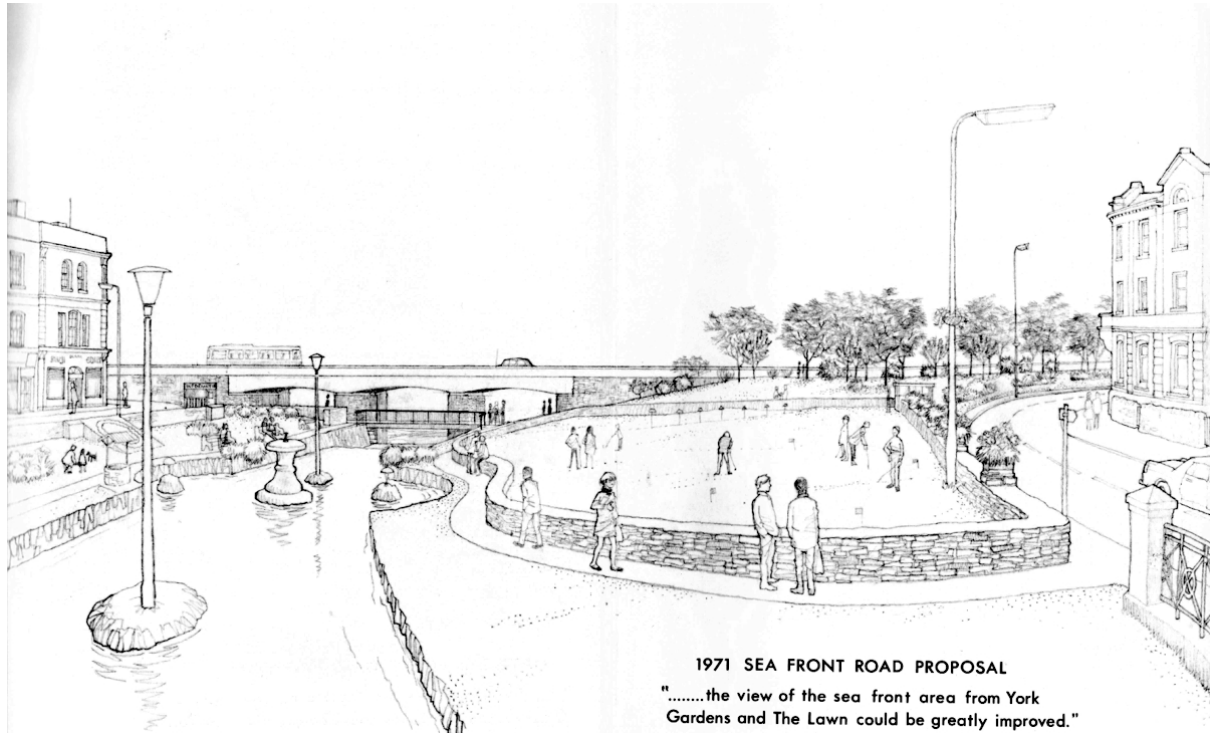
The preferred road plan envisaged starting the road near Eastcliff Road and taking a slice of Lanherne land on a descending incline until it crossed the end of the railway goods yard and flowed over the station buildings just above the roofs. The road would then fall more steeply to a junction with Marine Parade and Brookdale Terrace.

The case made for this road stated that 'not only does it take the obvious and direct route but it will offer outstanding views of the coast and the centre of Dawlish'. 'The existing road is narrow and tortuous and crosses the busiest pedestrian area at York Gardens and the Lawn [but with this plan] 'pedestrians will be able to walk about in almost perfect comfort and safety'. Devon County Council believe that the present road system in Dawlish will be totally inadequate by 1986. The only damage will be to the grounds of Lanherne and the demolition of Teignmouth Inn.

The plan produced almost total opposition from the town led by the local council. Their greatest complaint was that the central amenities [especially Tucks Plot] would be ruined as the front would feel completely boxed in and furthermore they foresaw the Marine Parade and Brookdale junction with the main road as highly dangerous as apparently there wasn't any money for a roundabout. Clearly the road would also adversely affect 3 of the central hotels in Dawlish. Other concerns included the noise of the traffic, the higher speeds of the vehicles and worries about conditions on the road in stormy weather.

Despite this the plan was approved in 1965. There was a short lull before the Dawlish Town Centre Report was published in 1971. This confirmed the concept of the road along the front but was more sympathetic to some of the concerns. It was an aesthetic improvement as the road would descend from Lanherne as before but would keep to the level of the railway across the front. There would be a better visual approach to the beach for

pedestrians as it would mask 'the unsightly railway bridge'. The problems of the junction with Brookdale Terrace and Marine Parade would be solved by maintaining the road at the same height until a short way up Teignmouth Hill thus allowing the other two roads to pass underneath.

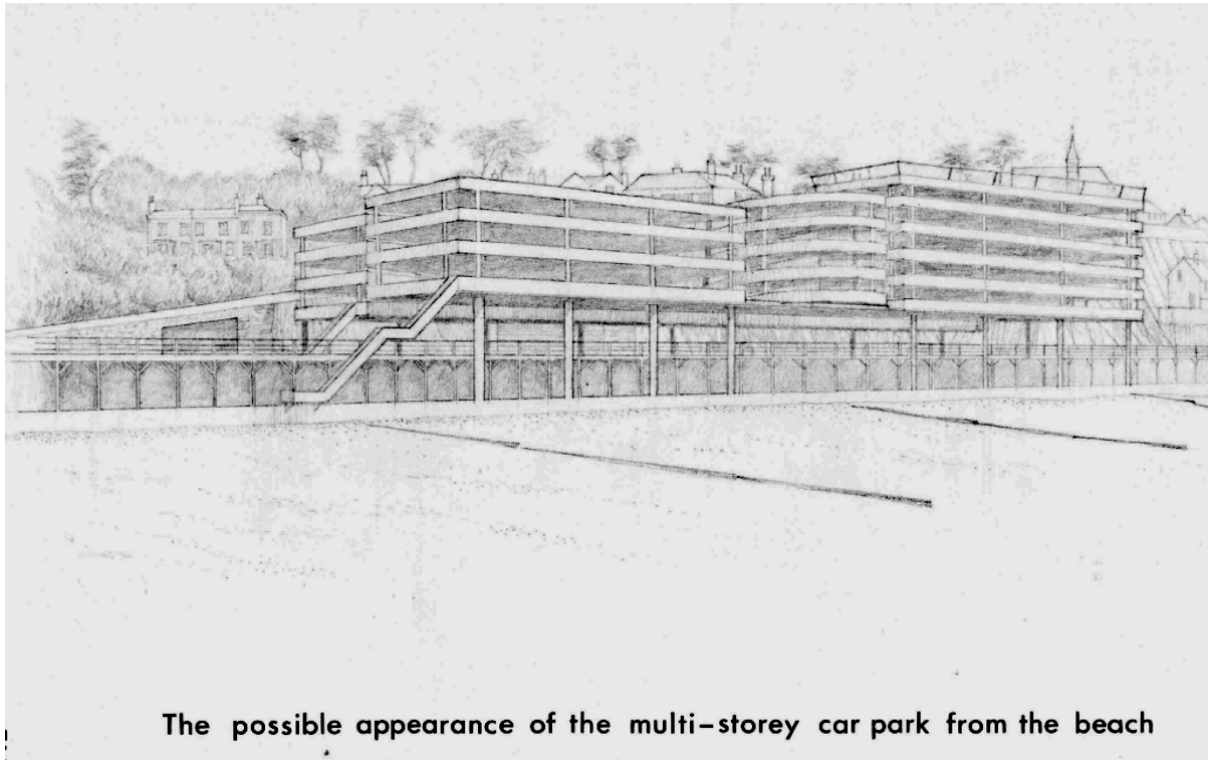


The plan laid down that there would be no entry or exits onto the main road between Elm Grove Road and Westcliff Road and so a local distributor road was needed which turned out to be the exact route of the previously considered Inner Relief Road of 1962. Apparently, this iteration of the plan did not need the destruction of 55 dwellings etc, only one is mentioned when creating the new curved section linking Barton Hill and Westcliff Road.

The scheme was designed to be implemented in 3 stages at different time periods. The road along the front came in stage 2 but the new section from Barton Hill in stage one. In stage 3 High Street would allow 2-way traffic requiring that 'any new building [should] be set back as and when an opportunity arises so that the road can be widened in due course'. The plan raises lots of questions such as how the junction between Teignmouth Hill and Westcliff Road would work given the blind corner for traffic down the hill and how buses would be catered for along a one-way system where the road dividing Tucks Plot from the viaduct no longer existed but as the plan said it 'aims to show principles rather than details'.

The plan also covered the hot topic of parking. Here it saw two major car parks. The size of Barton car park would be doubled by adding a single extra deck above the existing car park. A picture of that would have made interesting reading but they did supply a picture of what the second car park might look like which would be built over the railway goods yard and the railway line. It would be accessed from the new road along the front, could have a

restaurant on the top and could be at least 5 tiers high. It would span the seaward platform and the cloistered walkway beneath. As the illustration, on the next page, makes clear it would have a dramatic effect on how Dawlish looks. However, the plan makes clear that the 2 car parks would only be expanded if most of the on-street parking was banned.



The would-be plan has a lot of points worthy of discussion in the pub but personally I'm glad that we didn't have a new road along the front as Oscar Wilde might have put it having one barrier to the sea was a misfortune but having two would look like carelessness.

Local pair on the Titanic

It is not well known that a local man and his son were on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the Titanic. There was no dramatic rescue from the sea however as they only sailed from Southampton to Cherbourg.

Major Gerard T. Noel, who lived at Leigh House, 14 Fordens Lane, Holcombe had arranged the first class trip for his son William as they made their way to a family home in Finisterre. According to www.encyclopedia-titanic.org Major Noel had organised the trip 'to make up for an incident in which Gerard had accidentally shot his son'!

Amongst the first class facilities they could enjoy were squash courts, Turkish baths and 'kennels for 1st class dogs'.

Exeter and the 307 Squadron

Report of a talk by Michael Parrott



307 Squadron, RAF Clyst Honiton

Michael gave an excellent talk which held the audience fascinated. He traced the history of these Polish airmen, many of whom were highly skilled flyers. They battled against the Nazis when their country was invaded but when the Russians also invaded they were ordered to evacuate. They aimed to join the French airforce but getting there wasn't easy most going to Romania and taking a boat. When France was over-run they headed for Britain in 1940 to what they called 'Last hope island'.

When the Battle of Britain started the RAF were wary of involving the Polish airmen but later they were able to show their skills and joined in. In total 15,000 Polish airmen were involved which includes the ground crew and they were formed into 16 squadrons. 307 was unique in being trained as a night fighter squadron. They were based at a number of different airfields around the country before coming to Exeter in April 1941 and unusually stayed for two years. Their job was to defend the country against German bombers and their area covered the Isles of Scilly to West Hants and South Wales.

When they first arrived at RAF Clyst Honiton (now Exeter Airport) some of the crews slept in tents at the airfield whilst their more senior officers stayed at hotels. As time went on they all found accommodation with the local community and many became good friends, some even marrying locally.

From a local perspective their most memorable action took place during the Exeter Blitz, especially on 4th May 1942. 40 Junkers flew up the Exeter canal and 307 squadron was scrambled, although they only had 4 serviceable Beaufighter planes. 4 enemy aircraft were shot down which probably saved the city from complete destruction.



15 November 1942, Exeter Cathedral

The city was very grateful for the actions of the Polish squadron and in due course organised a memorial service. To mark the event a Polish flag was given to the city in memory. At some point the flag was lost which only came to light in 2012. A new flag had to be procured and since then an annual memorial service has been held on 15th November.

During questions afterwards two members referred to one of the Polish planes crashing through a hedge at the back of Kenton.

A walk along Brunswick Place

By David Allanach with help from Tricia Whiteaway

Background

This road is an almost unrecognised gem where every building belongs to the nineteenth century only the postal sorting office and a 1970s development spoil the picture. Its value is recognised by no less than 17 buildings being listed. Each building has its own character and is well worth a closer look.

However, we need a little background first. Brunswick Place is on the south side of Dawlish Water. The street is built on top of the original floodplain where the ground was rough and occasionally flooded. Behind what became the street were cliffs on top of which Plantation Terrace was constructed. Facing north and against the cliff this area did not get the best sunshine.

The mill was probably the earliest arrival opening about 1729. Our historian Tricia Whiteaway has posed the question why was the mill sited here? The older town mill clearly served the hinterland of the Aller and Dawlish Water valleys but what area did the Strand

Mill serve? It must have been serviced by the track from Holcombe but would that have provided sufficient work? Early illustrations show that the bridges over the brook were only made of planks and could not support a wagon but was there a ford? We do not know.

Our next clue as to developments comes with the map of 1787. It clearly shows the mill standing on its own. The nearest houses are in what we now call Brookdale Terrace with others along the beach as the knowledge of the health-giving properties of the town began to grow. By 1801 houses had filled the gap from Brookdale Terrace to the mill but not beyond and although Brook Cottage (later Brookdale) was built at this time beside Bacon Bridge it may not have been connected to the track by the mill. However, things were changing quickly. By 1810 the housing had crept along to at least number 17.

John Edye Manning's plans of 1807 for developing the centre of Dawlish moved things along further. The plan involved canalising the brook, building up the ground for the Lawn and putting houses on both sides of it. This work was interrupted by a serious flood of 1810 which swept away all the bridges, damaged many houses and swept a house in the Brookdale Terrace area out to sea. Nothing quite as damaging has happened since but buildings in this area are still vulnerable.

Once the road beyond the mill was extended to Brook Cottage this really allowed development to start. The roadway to the mill and beyond had always been known as Mill Row but when more affluent housing was being built it was decided to give a new name to the extension which became Brunswick Place commemorating the visit of Caroline of Brunswick who married the Prince of Wales, later George IV. Exactly where Brunswick Place commenced is not completely clear it may have been from the fore-runner of Marlborough House or possibly more likely from Brunswick House. Mill Row continued to be used as an address until the mid-1850s as the 1851 census lists 22 houses in Mill Row and only 10 in Brunswick Place. After that Brunswick Place incorporated Mill Row and stretched all the way from Teignmouth Hill to Barton Hill.

From the beginning it was clear that in comparison to the Strand Brunswick Place was the unfavoured side probably partly because of the shade and partly because of the noise, dust and traffic generated by the mill. Directories listed a good number of gentry in the Strand but over the years only Brookdale Cottage featured regularly on the other side, although there was an occasional clergyman and once a doctor. This idea of second-class residences was reinforced by the fact that for the first twenty years home owners could watch people promenading on the Lawn but couldn't access it and although Waterloo bridge was built in 1828 it was as much to allow easy passage between the Strand and Brunswick as to allow access to the Lawn itself.

In the first half of the nineteenth century Mill Road/Brunswick Place was home to many small craftsmen and women. There were coopers, painters, tailors, watchmakers, bootmakers, carpenters, milliners, cabinet makers, Honiton lace makers, harness makers and the like but by the mid-1850s a few shopkeepers were appearing and over time many of the cottages had their front rooms converted. The 1856 directory lists the first lodging house and the first hotel is noted in 1875. Clearly tourism was taking off in a big way and to service the need the first refreshment rooms were noted in 1897. The first of several private schools in the street was listed in 1875. As elsewhere in Dawlish there was retrenchment in the holiday accommodation from the 1960s and later in the number of shops. In a sign of the times the 1995 directory listed a residential care home.

The walk part 1: Up to the Mill



1884: The corner shop has grown an upper storey and next to it is a gap later filled by two shops. Otherwise much as it is today.

We start at the bottom of Teignmouth Hill. The building on the corner was the Devon & Cornwall bank (latterly Nat West) which had relocated from Lawn Terrace. The building is of the usual solid construction to give the customers a sense of security. Near the roof a date is incised but weathering is making it difficult to read but it is 1890. The bank and the building next door replaced two older buildings in the shape of an inverted L. No. 5 Brookdale Terrace is designed to match numbers 1-4 but with subtle differences. 1-4 Brookdale Terrace were built 12 years earlier and replaced a large house on the site. They seem to have been built as lodging houses, a function they assumed as soon as they were completed.

The corner shop by Jubilee bridge was early identified as being in a lucrative position and has had many different businesses over the years. In the early part of the nineteenth century it was a two storey cottage, then the base for the town's first postmaster, John Lowe in 1828 (1). The post office moved to a more advantageous position in Piermont Place in 1838 and John Lowe and his family followed in due course. Soon after the tall houses at nos 1-4 Brookdale Terrace were completed the house and shop were remodelled with an extra floor. With its elevated outlook it gained the name Seaview. It soon became a hotel but amongst other things has been a jewellers and a restaurant.

Behind Seaview is a row of cottages hidden from view. They replaced the poor house destroyed in the 1810 flood. One house called Brookdale Cottage was the home for many years of Albert Cotton the Town Crier. These cottages illustrate the fact that for most of the way along the road there was room for a second row of houses under the cliff that hid behind those at the front. At one time these houses enjoyed a front garden onto the road but by about

1890 the temptation to build over them was too great and number 30A (Icecream parlour) came first followed in a few years by number 29 (Black Swan Gifts). These shops originally had no accommodation over them, allowing more light behind.



Launceston House: A puzzling building with one bow window, two round topped windows and two rectangular windows plus a clock which isn't wired in.

Number 28 (My Vape), 27 (Pizza & Grill) and 26 may well have been a row of cottages originally with numbers 27 & 26 given an enlarged frontage later.. Number 26, once called Launceston House has never been converted to a shop. It is dated early to mid C19 and shows more of its heritage with its bow window. It is distinguished by the clock on its frontage. Alas, it does not work and is not in good shape and the current occupiers have not been able to discover its origins.

Next come the seeming twins numbers 25 (Tattoos) and 24 (Georgian House, now Barking Lovely) linked by two identical looking shops and in between there is a passageway to a courtyard and a small row of cottages with tall chimney stacks. The Georgian house was almost certainly so-called because it is one of the earliest houses still standing in the street. There may be a reference to it in the Manorial Roll of 1791 'Richard Reed to build a substantial dwelling house [on] all that parcel of waste ground at Dawlish Strand Green adjoining said mill, extent length from mill to within 16 feet of the stable belonging to John Brickdale Esq., in depth from the cliff to a supposed straight line to be drawn from the SE corner of said stable to the NE corner of said mills' (2). Nos 25 & 24 are the only houses end-

on to the road which may have been influenced by the position of the stables. Note the distinctive curved tops to the windows.



The not quite matching 'twins'. Is the right hand building older?

Number 25 has had two interesting occupants. From at least 1866 for 40 years or so this was the home and shop of Frederick Davies an early photographer and competitor of the Chapman family. His photographs can still be found today. However, he also expanded his interests and by 1878 he was the proprietor of the public baths in Marine Parade and Secretary to the Gas Company. Later he was also Secretary to the Dawlish Ladies Bathing Association. By 1910 the premises had been taken over by Eliza Ann Cridge who operated refreshment rooms. (Another member of the family ran a cafe in part of the current Coop building). Next door her daughters ran an art and needlework shop before taking over the cafe. Interestingly it was number 24 which had been the first refreshment rooms to open in Brunswick Place back in 1897.

Some things never change 1954-2024

'Dawlish has rarely suffered from flooding but if there is no flood damage to pay for, there is a serious situation to face up to in the state of the stream, which is now a blot on the fair face of the Lawn. What is the use of advertising a beauty spot, if that which makes Dawlish unique - its stream – is an irritating and ugly eyesore to residents and visitors? The

persistent flooding [has] brought down not only tons of mud and shingle, but heaps of bricks and large stones'. *Dawlish Gazette 31 December 1954.*



Boys playing on the island in the stream 2024.

Surnames in Devon and beyond

Report of the talk given by Robert Hesketh

This was a talk with hundreds of examples of surnames quoted but as Robert Hesketh made clear this only scratched the surface of those used in this country and they are still being added to.

Surnames in England mostly started in the 13th to 15th centuries, but they started earlier in France and later in Scotland. Often the first surnames were particular to one person but this name was then carried on by later generations eg Little, Small, Redhead etc.

To a large extent surnames can be broken down into 4 categories:

Occupations: Smith, Thatcher, Baker, Goldsmith, Chapman (itinerant trader), Mason, Potter, Tozer (teaser of wool). Tucker or Tuck, as in Tuck's Plot, is associated with the important Devon woollen industry and the tucking mills.

Nicknames: Wiseman, Jolly, Prowse (valiant), Smart, Kennedy (uglyhead, Irish), Buller (issuer of false bulls)

Local: Some are generic names which cannot be pinpointed to a particular place eg Wood, Beech, Brigg (Bridges), Yates (Gates), Torr, Sutton (South settlement), Noakes (at an oak). Others refer to specific places which themselves are often descriptive of their surroundings eg Widecombe (wide valley), Ilfracombe (Alfred's combe), Beer (grove or wood), Fleming (from Flanders)

Relationships: Richardson, Alison. MacXxxxxx means son of and O'Neil etc grandson of

One of the difficulties that Robert pointed out was that one name can often mean more than one thing eg Axe could refer to the river or a woodsman, Fox could mean crafty or red hair, Dart could mean trees, arrowmaker or the river and Raleigh could refer to rye or red clearing.

There were many questions at the end mainly relating to personal surnames but perhaps unfairly Robert was also asked for definitions of six local names the most interesting suggestion was that Shapter might relate to Shap Tor. It later transpired that one of the other local names Tripe was self-explanatory as someone who handled Tripe!

Visit to Ashcombe Tower

by Frances Hutchinson



For August the group went on a visit to Ashcombe Tower. A near-by country house, although not huge the house is interesting from an historical view point.

The house was built onto a tower that stood on the edge of the Mamhead estate as a folly. The tower was built in 1832. The Mamhead estate was eventually split up and various bits sold off. In 1932 Brigadier Sir Ralph Rayner bought the area known as the Ashcombe estate. He and his wife Lady Elizabeth Raynor built the house, which was completed in 1935. Their grandson Ralph Raynor and his wife Eleanor now live there and showed us around.

The house is built in the art deco style that was very popular in the 1930s, with arts and craft elements to it. It was designed by the architect Brian O'Rourke who was mostly known for designing the interiors of cruise liners. It is the only domestic house he designed, although he did design some other buildings including The Berkeley Hotel in Knightsbridge, London and the equatorial telescope at the Royal Observatory, Herstmonceux. In 1937 the house featured in Country Life magazine, showing it as a modern country residence. It emphasised its style and importance in modern architectural design.

The house is mostly brick with render, and the original tower made of stone. The drive up is impressive with woodland surrounding the land. The tour started in the dining room with tea and coffee. The dining room was recently redecorated due to a flood from a leak above. Luckily the red leather dining chairs from the original design were out for restoration at the time so they have been used in the new design. The dining room has several paintings on the walls of the sea and ships, including one by a Cornish artist of Teignmouth. There is a mirrored panel at one end making the room lighter and feel longer.



Ralph showed us around downstairs in two groups. The house was restored during Covid lockdown. The dining room and lounge flow through to each other. The hallway also used to be part of the open plan design, but oak doors have been used to separate the lounge and hallway now. Originally the oak doors were used elsewhere in the hallway. Glass doors were added in the 1980s to separate part of the lounge as a sort of music room. A grand piano and two different types of harp sit in this area.

Then we moved into the office. It was redecorated in the last few years with the desk facing out of the window to make the most of the fantastic view across the hills and woodland. A large trophy cabinet filled with many awards stands on one side. Two old bugles hang on the wall above a modern log burner below.

The hallway below the stairs has several family portraits hanging in it. There is a surprise under the stairs in the form of a hidden bar that gets revealed by opening up the hatch

doors. The bar is occasionally still used for parties and family gatherings. Below the bar is a wine cellar.

We were then taken up a few stairs to the map room. It is like a large lounge or recreation room. The walls are decorated with framed historical maps to reflect the original use of the room. Sir Ralph Rayner had been an avid collector of antique maps which he had used to cover the walls of the room. The room used to be half its size, but in the 1980s it was extended to include an area that was once the squash court. The original glass roof of the squash court has been kept giving the room a lot more light.

Then back into the dining room which leads into the garden through patio doors. There is a lap style swimming pool to one side of a large square lawn. Flower beds edge the lawn adding some colour and interest, with large trees at the back. A large wisteria frames the patio doors adding a more country cottage feel to a larger house.

The house is a well-preserved example of 1930s architectural design that will continue to be of historical importance more so to future generations. It is still very much a family home and we would like to thank Ralph and his family for showing it to us and telling us about its history.

900 years-old ram's head protected



For years those in the know have come to the outside of the north side of St Gregory's church to admire a small remnant of the Norman church built on this site probably around 1148. It pre-dates the oldest part of the current church by about 250 years when the tower was built.

This single remnant was originally a corbel stone, projecting from the wall in order to support the roof beams. It was carved from Beer stone in the shape of a ram's head and must have looked both impressive and maybe fearsome in the flickering candlelight of the original church.

The church historian Muriel Bradshaw says 'it reminds me of Abraham's obedience to God's command to him to sacrifice his son Isaac. He makes all the preparations to do so, and at this point, God calls again and tells him to stay his hand and sacrifice instead the ram he sees caught in a thicket.'

The soft stone has been weathering badly so it is good to know that the church have now taken it inside and it currently rests in the porch.

Correction

Sir Walter Raleigh was born about 1552 not 1522 as quoted in the last edition.

